

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KINSHA 09119 011456Z

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ACTION MED-03

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ONY-00 /004 W

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P 011430Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 317

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KINSHASA 9119

FOR DR. WATSON, DIRECTOR M/MED, ONLY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: AMED, CG

SUBJECT: OUTBREAK OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN ZAIRE

1. AS YOU ARE AWARE, FOR THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS THIS MISSION HAS BEEN TRYING TO COPE WITH THE OUTBREAK OF A HIGHLY DANGEROUS VIRUS EPIDEMIC. OUR EFFORTS HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TOWARD (A) GIVING SUPPORT TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION, INCLUDING CDC REPS, WORKING TO CONTROL THE SITUATION, AND (B) PROTECTING THE SIZABLE AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN ZAIRE. TO ASSURE A COORDINATED EFFORT, WE HAVE SET UP A WORKING GROUP COMPOSED OF KEY MISSION MEMBERS, WHICH INCLUDE THE RMO, PCMO AND PHO/AID; WE HAVE ALSO INITIATED DAILY SITUATION REPORTS WHICH ARE FULLY COORDINATED HERE AND ARE DESIGNED TO ASSURE THAT ALL MAJOR END-USERS ARE KEPT CURRENTLY AND ACCURATELY INFORMED.

2. I BELIEVE THIS SYSTEM IS WORKING WELL AND THAT WE ARE MAKING GOOD PROGRESS. CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES HAVE ARISEN, HOWEVER, WHICH I FEEL YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF SINCE THEY INVOLVE THE ROLE OF THE RMO. THESE DIFFICULTIES CENTER ON A DIFFERENCE OF VIEW BETWEEN THE RMO AND ME ON THE EXTEND TO WHICH HIS ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE COORDINATED WITH THOSE OF OTHERS WORKING ON THIS PROBLEM. SPECIFICALLY, THE RMO HAS TAKEN THE POSITION THAT HE SHOULD MAINTAIN THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE FREELY THROUGH THE MED CHANNEL ON ANY ASPECT OF THE EPIDEMIC WITHOUT REFERENCE TO, COORDINATION WITH OR EVEN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OTHERS IN THE MISSION WORKING ON THIS PROBLEM, INCLUDING MYSELF.

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PAGE 02 KINSHA 09119 011456Z

IT IS MY FIRM VIEW THAT, WHEREAS THE COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY OF

THE MED CHANNEL MUST BE PRESERVED WITH RESPECT TO INDIVIDUAL MEDICAL CASES, THIS DOES NOT EXTEND TO MATTERS OF BROAD POLICY IMPLICATIONS, AS IS THE CASE WITH THE CURRENT EPIDEMIC. I HAVE THEREFORE INSISTED THAT THE RMO CLEAR WITH RELEVANT ELEMENTS OF THE MISSION AND ULTIMATELY WITH ME OR THE DCM, MESSAGES SENT THROUGH THE MED CHANNEL WHICH RELATE TO GENERAL ASSESSMENTS OF THE EPIDEMIC AND RECOMMENDED COURSES OF ACTION. I CONSIDER SUCH COORDINATION AS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO DEAL WITH A SITUATION AS COMPLEX AND POLITICALLY VOLATILE AS WE HAVE HERE AND TO AVOID GIVING CONFLICTING SIGNALS TO THE VARIOUS CONCERNED PARTIES IN THE US. A CASE IN POINT IS THE DIFFERING ADVICE RE TRAVEL TO ZAIRE CONVEYED THROUGH THE MED CHANNEL (KINSHASA 8408) AND SUBSEQUENTLY IN OUR SITREP (KINSHASA 8919). THE LATTER WAS A FULLY COORDINATED MESSAGE INCLUDING THE SPECIFIC CONCURRENCE OF THE RMO, AND I REGARD IT AS THE MISSION'S POSITION.

3. I HAVE TOLD THE RMO THAT ANY DIFFERENCES ON MAJOR POINTS THAT CANNOT BE RESOLVED HERE WILL BE REPORTED TO WASHINGTON, BUT THAT THEY SHOULD BE REPORTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO ASSURE THAT ALL CONCERNED PARTIES, BOTH HERE AND IN WASHINGTON, ARE AWARE OF SUCH DIFFERING VIEWS AND WILL THEREFORE NOT OPERATE AT CROSS PURPOSES. I HAVE ALSO MADE CLEAR THAT I HAVE NO INTENTION OF OBSTRUCTING THE RMO'S USE OF THE MED CHANNEL ON MATTERS THAT DO NOT EXTEND INTO THE POLICY AREA. BUT I MUST INSIST ON FULL CONTROL AND COORDINATION, AND COOPERATION BY ALL MISSION MEMBERS, WHEN IT COMES TO A PROBLEM OF SUCH BROAD DIMENSIONS AS THE CURRENT EPIDEMIC.

4. WHILE THE RMO HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT MY POSITION ON THIS VITAL QUESTION OF COORDINATION, AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION I AM HOPEFUL HE NOW UNDERSTANDS ITS NECESSITY. MEANWHILE, I WOULD WELCOME ANY COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE ON THE GUIDELINES I HAVE ESTABLISHED AS WELL AS ANY SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW, FROM MED'S STANDPOINT, WE MAY BEST RESPOND TO END-USER NEEDS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976KINSHA09119
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760406-0980
From: KINSHASA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761194/aaaaddr1.tel
Line Count: 96
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION MED
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 JUL 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <07 JUL 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OUTBREAK OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN ZAIRE
TAGS: AMED, CG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006